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ABSTRACT

The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 (NLS) is a federally supported longitudinal study of a national sample of some 23,000 young people first surveyed as high school seniors in the spring of 1972. The historical precedents of such a study include the work of Friend and Haggert in a Boston settlement house, Louis Terman's genetic studies of genius, Donald Super's work in upstate New York, and John Flanagan and Project Talent. To help launch the NLS, Doc Howe and John Gardner worked for the necessary cooperation between several federal agencies. Finally, Dorothy Gilford of the National Center for Education Statistics began the project. The original survey obtained data from 17,726 twelfth grade students in 1,044 schools concurring their plans, aspirations, previous experiences, abilities, and school programs. The First Follow-Up was conducted in the fall of 1973 and the Second Follow-Up began in the fall of 1974. Each future data collection is expected to add to the individual histories -- that is, to the experiences, activities, attitudes, satisfactions, environments, and plans of the students as they progress into early adulthood. (BW)

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Objectives, Design, and History of the National Longitudinal Study

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The Remote History

The title of this presentation (note the order of the elements of content)--"Objectives, Design, and History ..." was obviously set by some shadowy symposium planner whose primary allegiance is to empirical social science. Objectives and design are critical openers in planning or explaining a research effort, but it is the history element that provides the most essential context for comprehending such a magnificant and potentially significant social experiment as that encompassed by the National Longitudinal Study. That is where we should like to begin.

May we state that the National Longitudinal Study is a federally supported, continuing or longitudinal study of a national sample of some 23,000 young people first surveyed as high school seniors in the spring of 1972. The content focus is on the significant educational and vocational events that transpire now from year to year in the lives of this generation of young people.

The great grandfathers of this effort contain some now revered scientists, and some barely remembered but nevertheless significant others concerned with understanding forces affecting personal attainment. In the latter category are Friend and Haggert, case workers in a Boston settlement house, who maintained careful historical records on counselees, and noted in the 1930's that certain early childhood experiences treated by the house were associated with the adult successes and failures in vocational stability that those returning twenty years for renewed assistance later exhibited. In the category of the recognized great great-grandfathers, we must take reverent note of Louis Terman, whose genetic studies of genius had the magnificant consequence of identifying a powerful causative factor through the efficacy of persistent tracing, over time, of later failures and accomplishments.

The grandfathers include some eminent men at whose feet it is deeply rewarding to sit and listen attentively: e.g., Donald Super, who set off from Teachers College across the George Washington Bridge in 1951 with some hungry graduate students and some second-hand tape recorders to devote the next twenty years of his professional life and being to the observation and empathic sharing of precedent experiences and antecendent events in the lives of several hundred young people who resided in an obscure upstate New York community. Next came John Flanagan, Super's friend and cohort in the World War II pilot testing program, whose Project Talent effort beginning ten years later translated Super's clinical concerns with the continuing case studies into statistical questions from which generalizations to the national population could be made. That is, Super said: putting high school failures like Thomas Edison or Louis Bromfield aside, what really happens to those who flounder in school--so that I, as a trainer of public school counselors, can improve intervention at any point along the way. Flanagan said: let's trace the picture on a broader canvas, using a probability sample, toward the implications for federal investment in educational services.

The more recent geneology--as we move to the fathers (and mothers, and midwives)--provides an even more eloquent testimony to the enduring and selfless concern with personal lives of young people, to the integrity of scientific self-descipline, to the political skills and awareness, and to the mature concern with directing federal purpose, of a current generation of societal architects. First were the able statemen, Doc Howe and John Gardner, who said: let's cut across competing inter-office rivalries at OE, and pool funds so that a truly significant effort for different interlocking responsibilities can be mounted--and then indeed pulled that off. Witness: the National Longitudinal Study, though vested with the National Center for Education Statistics, late of OE and now of NEW, has contributions to its budget for the current effort from such OE agencies as the Office of Planning, Budgeting, and Evaluation; the Bureau of Post-Secondary Education; and the Bureau of Occupational and Adult Education. This pooling of resources and overlapping configurations of interests in what may cause what to happen in human lives as a function of particular educational intervention (1) permitted an adequate budget for a major effort to take place, and (2) brought to bear,

through the interaction of professional civil servants concerned with what happens to individuals as a result of the exercise of their particular interventions, a leveling to what are the central factors and variables, in real life activities or experiences, that we can sort and count.

(For, as you will see, NLS content differs from that of its predecessors in a highly significant way: that is, it is not the province of a collection of isolated human development scholars and theorists, who are concerned with such constructs as specific aptitudes, or vocational interest scales, or cognitive styles, or manifest anxieties, but of people like James Allen, whose cab driver and congressmen both said, "Doc, when the kids go through all that, can they read?" The important substance of NLS is such questions as: What kind of curriculum was sustained in high school? What were the characteristics of the teachers or any special programs? What are the young people with these varied histories now doing--studying, working, looking for work, loafing, or what? Now, given our recognition that our unattended society may restrict or confine some of its subgroups to its own detriment--the minorities or the poor--what is now happening as a consequence of special attention to these young people? Are the traditional barriers to access and success breaking down?)

Those who have rebelled against the university scholars devoting their lives to a particular class of dependent variables--or those who have wondered at the seven different OE agencies with a few thousand dollars directed to seven similar studies proceeding separately--can only pause a moment to give silent tribute to the Friends and Haggerts, the Termans, the Supers, the Flanagans, the Howes and the Gardners and Allens, who paved the way.

The revered mother who gave birth and early nourishment to NLS is our respected Chairman of this Symposium. It was Dorothy Gilford who, as Assistant Commissioner for Education, National Center for Education Statistics, with the varied pediatric assistances of such NCES staff as Ezra Glazer, Hal Nisselson, Bruce Thompson, Marjorie Chandler, Bill Fetters, and Ken Tabler, pulled it all together. Their planning (beginning in 1969), direction, and management have seen the almost unbelievable accomplishment now of: a resolution of differences, merging, maturing, moving together of OE interests; the achievement of a data base and antecedent history in terms the social scientist, the congressman, and James Allen's cab driver can all understand when those data are organized; and, such a modern miracle as virtually no

attrition of individuals, among the original 23,000, despite a rather long and now three times administered set of requests for detailed personal information.

To sum with regard to remote history: there are at least five significant elements. First was the combination of scientific curiosity backed by humanitarian concern that some university scholars, counselors, and social workers brought to bear on the way they chose to spend their lives in interactions with other people. Second was the recognition and demonstration of the efficacy of the longitudinal strategy in learning about and understanding human behavior. Third was the pressing for transition of the human concern and the scientific or technical strategy to the federal service or purpose. Fourth was the creation of a new climate and style of functioning within OE that would permit such an effort to succeed and pay off. Fifth was the tireless and dedicated implementation of the operational agent for OE and HEW, whose work can now be fairly appraised by what their varied contractors have achieved for them.

The Recent History

The best statement now of the objectives and design of NLS is probably that provided by current summary brochure describing the effort. It reads or (in part) may be paraphrased as follows:

During the transition from high school to the postsecondary world, many of the country's young adults go through some of the most significant experiences in their lives. One of the functions of the American educational system is to help prepare them for this transition. However, the preparation process becomes increasingly difficult as society and its needs change and become more complex.

In formulating appropriate policies and programs to meet the challenges of helping young adults, it is believed that educational planners and administrators must base their decisions upon substantive data that bear on such questions as: What is the contribution of our educational and training programs and facilities toward the full development of the capabilities and talents of the population? What can be done to further improve and maintain equality of educational opportunity, without compromising the emphasis on

excellence? What is the impact of social and economic factors which change over time and which may affect drastically the educational and vocational progress of young people, and how may this impact be positively moderated by our educational institutions and through federal effort? How well are we doing on the development of human and material resources that will meet critical social and economic priorities?

The National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 was designed to provide an ongoing and updated data base from which these and other areas of information necessary for educational and occupational policy decisionmaking can be examined.

Sponsored by the United States Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, the National Longitudinal Study of the High School Class of 1972 is designed to determine what happens to young adults after they leave high school, as measured by their experiences, plans, aspirations, and attitudes at various points in time. These types of personal information are essential for the review and reformulation of Federal policies and programs designed to enhance educational opportunity and achievement and to upgrade occupational attainments and career outcomes.

Over 1,200 high schools and nearly 23,000 students comprise the study sample. It was designed to provide accurate profiles of both 12th grade students in 1972 and of analysis subpopulations, such as minority groups. In this way, reliable statistics of special interest to policymakers can be obtained.

Basic planning and design of the study was contracted in 1970 to the Research Triangle Institute. Westat contributed by the basic design of the sample of secondary schools and individuals. The first or base-year survey was conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS) of Princeton, New Jersey, in the spring of 1972. The survey obtained data from 17,726 12th grade students in 1,044 public, private, and church-affiliated secondary schools. Data were collected from the students by the following means: a form that included questions about their plans, aspirations, and previous experiences; a brief test battery covering a broad range of verbal and nonverbal measures; a counselor questionnaire dealing with school guidance activities; and school records.

The first follow-up survey was conducted in the fall of 1973 by the U.S. Bureau of the Census and Research Triangle Institute (RTI) of North Carolina. The young people first surveyed in 1972, were surveyed to establish where they were in the fall of 1973 and what they were doing with regard to work, education, and/or training. Similar information was requested for a prescribed time period during the fall of 1972, to facilitate tracing of their progress since leaving high school and to define the factors (including base-year measures) that affect that progress.

Due to the fact that some schools could not respond in the base-year survey, further attempts were made as a part of the first follow-up effort to secure participation of the 230 non-participant primary sample schools. This "resurvey" activity, involved securing school cooperation, selecting samples of up to 18 former students (1972 seniors) per school, and obtaining full first follow-up data plus (retrospectively) critical items from the base-year survey. The "resurvey" activities were successful in 204 of the 230 primary sample schools; thus, students from 1,153 of the 1,200 original primary sample schools were included in the first follow-up survey. Adding 131 back-up schools and 16 sample augmentation schools increased the total number of participant schools to 1,300. Respondents to the first follow-up returned 21,350 first follow-up questionnaires; this represents 90.5 percent of the augmented sample.

The second follow-up, also conducted by RTI, begain in the fall of 1974, with data gathering for this phase now virtually complete.

Periodically, the additional data will be obtained from members of the High School Class of 1972. Each data collection is expected to add to the individual histories--that is, to the experiences, activities, attitudes, satisfactions, environments, and plans of the students as they progress into the critical years of early adulthood. Collectively, the individual histories should provide quantitative information to policymakers, planners, and researchers about a variety of issues:

- The demand for postsecondary education and training, including vocational and technical education.
- The abilities and characteristics of actual and potential users of postsecondary education.
- The extent to which earlier plans and aspirations persist over time and are eventually fulfilled.

- The reasons why young adults change their plans and fail to accomplish earlier objectives.
- The impact of federally funded postsecondary programs on initial choices and later activities and plans.
- The factors influencing young people in choosing their lifework and in determining success and satisfaction in this work.
- The extent to which educational experiences have prepared them for their work.
- The characteristics and abilities of those making various occupational choices and the reasons why such choices are made.
- The impacts of high school experiences, curriculums, peer-group aspirations, guidance counseling, etc., on initial educational and occupational plans and on perseverance and success in achieving them.
- Young adults' awareness of educational and occupational alternatives, their perceptions of options open to them, and the extent to which they have been limited by lack of information.
- The role of financial consideration in setting low-aspiration goals and in failing to meet high-aspiration goals.

Periodic reports, to be issued by the U.S. Office of Education and made available to the educational community, will contain summaries and analyses of the data. Also, the data base itself, as it now exists and as it is updated, will be made available to interested researchers for their own studies.

Thus: the important objectives of the study are two-fold: to provide a data base for policy decisions that may guide federal contributions through the nation's educational system to the fullest development of human and material resources; and, to provide our social scientists and scholars with a rapidly enrichening data base, that no one of us alone could afford, but which we may utilize in pursuit of our own professional interests. This, we are sure those who would come to this symposium would wholeheartedly agree, is responsible creative federalism at its very best.